

Gender Inequality in African Politics: A Case of Nigeria from 1999-2015

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study takes a look at existing literature on Gender, Inequality, Equality, Equity, Empowerment and Democracy. It analyzes the literature on the relationship between these terms, how this translates to Gender Inequality, provides recommendations for the policy objective of getting gender equality. And increasing women's representation and participation in the political process so as to achieve sustainable development in modern nation states including Nigeria which is the case study of this research.

Different researchers and advocates of the term good governance have related its use to the sustainable progress on various issues to improve governance that targets community participation, sustainable growth and development, inclusive policies that positively effects on the poor, appropriate technological advancement and gender equality and a lot of other positive issues (Grindle, 2008; World bank, 1989; UNDP, 1997; Amundsen, 2012). Although, with variants in the various definitions of the term good governance, there is an agreement on those on the right, left or centre wings of the political divide as conditions that guard rule of law, enhances human rights and plays a positive role for the state. It has also been empirically defined that development and good governance are two sides of a coin that are not mutually exclusive of each other.

With a premise to the understanding of what makes gender equality, the concept gender can now be explicated on.

a) **Gender**- is simply about the differences on social and cultural roles assigned to males and females in any given society but usually manipulated to assign value to the human life and create unequal opportunities (Kabeer, 2003). Gender roles are not static but dynamic and vary from one society to another. They are artificial constructs that distinguishes the behaviour pattern expected from males and females (UN Gender Theme Group, 2013). The government Policies and institutions put in place in these different societies play crucial roles in determining the living conditions of men and women and therefore leading to the socially artificial construction of gender.

b) **Gender Equality**- is referred to as the removal of all forms of discriminatory practices based on the biological differences of either being male or female towards the same and equal and treatment to resources and benefits of every citizen in a state (Vleuten, 2007). It ensures same treatment for both sexes in the enforcement of the state policies and legislations (UN Gender Theme Group, 2013). Simply means that, all have equal access to participation, voice and inclusiveness in the overall administration of the country.

There are five (5) types of Equality, namely:

- 1 Political Equality: this implies that all the citizens of a State should have equal Access to all offices of authority, rights to form political parties and contest in elections.
- 2 Equality of Opportunity: this means that all the citizens of a should be equally eligible to enjoy various opportunities in the society.
- 3 Social Equality: this implies that all the citizens of a state should be treated equally, without any discrimination on the ground of religion, belief, caste or creed, gender.
- 4 Civil Equality: this means that every citizen of a state is equal before the law regardless of class, religion.
- 5 Economic Equality: this means that every means that every citizen of a State should be provided with equal opportunity so they can make their won economic progress.

One major report that mesasures the level of gender equality in countries all over the world is the Global Gender Gap Index which was first published in 2006 by the World Economic Forum. It is an Index

designed to measure gender equality. It ranks countries according to calculated gender gap between women and men in four key areas: health, education, economy and politics to gauge the state of gender equality in a country. Gender imbalance to the advantage of women does not affect the score. It covers major and emerging economies. It measures four key areas of inequality between men and women in 130 countries across the globe, which 93% of world's population:

i. Economic participation and opportunity- outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment.

ii. Educational attainment- outcomes on access to basic and higher level education.

iii. Political empowerment- outcomes on representation in decision-making structures.

iv. Health and survival- outcomes on life expectancy and sex ratio.

Thirteen out of the fourteen variables used to create the index are from publicly available "hard data" indicators from international organizations, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The highest possible score is 1 (equality or better for women, except for life span (106% or better for women) and gender parity at birth) and the lowest possible score is 0. In 2015, Nigeria ranked 125 out of the 145 countries that reported on.

c) Gender Equity- closely related to gender equality but considers the most effective treatment in the allocation of resources and opportunities between women and men under the laws and policies of a state (Olga, 2013). It does not have to be the same precise equal treatment of both sexes but the most optimal methods that can bridge gender gaps and better the conditions of women in every spheres of life (UN Women, 2013). It could be seen as a tool to aim at gender imbalance in any given society.

d) Empowerment- this term involves the various policies, set of actions, taken by the leaders of a country towards her citizenries, in generating opportunities and building collective capabilities. That provides individual with more informed choices in decision making that leads to the realisation of a high standard of living and a better society for all (IDEA 2013). It specifically targets particular programmes that increase the productivity of women. It provides opportunities to be equipped with the necessary important skills that can make women or the target groups play active roles in decision making processes and with the outcome of self-sustainability and overall wellbeing in the society (JICA, 2011). One of the basic fundamental rights of the United Nation (UN) as regards women is the equality of the sexes free from any form of discrimination. The universal declaration states that "States Parties recognize that all persons are equal before and under the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law"- (United Nations, Article 5). The international bill of Human Rights also highlights the rights of women as humans to be treated with equal dignity as the male counterparts. However, it is sad to note that this is most times not the reality in many of our societies, even in the perceived developed world most especially when it involves giving access or opportunities to women in the political space. Hence, the creation of various institutions such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), The United Nations Women (UNWomen) e.t.c. To enforce non-discriminatory practices against women and widen engaging stage for women on the international stage in an engendered way.

1.1 Democracy and Women's Rights

Democracy is generally defined as government of the people, by the people, and for the people. It is seen to be the best form of governance that guarantees inclusiveness, participation, accountability and voice for all, taking into account minority and marginalised groups (Abimbola&Adesote, 2012, pp 248-265). Scholars argue that equality of each and every individual and freedom of choice are the backbone of any democratic society. They describe democracy as that mean through which an egalitarian society in which every individual has a say in Public affairs of how a country is being run through its legislated national laws, government policies and actions of the state (Dahl et al, 2003; Abimbola&Adesote, 2012; Agbaje, 1999).

Effective and efficient institutions that enhance political and economic environment conducive for sustainable growth are needed in successful democratic regimes. Economic growth alone is not the important factor, human development and freedom is also a necessity of democratic administrations which sets it widely apart from other types of governance. Making certain institutions are fair to all and accountable to its citizens with a strong protection of human rights that includes women's rights is the foundation to good democratic governance (UNDP, 2010).

The kind of sovereign power being exercised or residing in the people through adults who have attained political suffrage either through right to vote or be voted for directly or indirectly that empowers citizens in full participation and representation at decision making distinguishes democracy from autocracy, monarchy or military dictatorship (Kaplan, 2004). In other words, democracy assures

meaningful and healthy competition among different groups or individuals in a society towards the selection of capable leaders through a defined process that is regular, free and fair in ensuring integrity and participation of all major and minority groups in the society (Yusuf, 2012).

Since independence, Nigerian women have been faced with the problems of exclusion and marginalisation from the male counterparts in political processes (Falola, 2012). To counter this problem, participations and representation has to be encourage, promoted and avenues needs to be established for the womenfolks to understand their important in politics (Iyayi 2017). Several international organisations including the United Nations (UN) itself have been advocating for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality to be mainstreamed into the administration of different countries most especially that of its member states (UN Women 2013). The United Nations through its UN Women and other relevant agencies pushes for the inclusion of women in governance institutions at different levels from the lowest to the highest level of governance of a country. In Nigeria, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works on projects that boost women participation in elections and democracy. It also helps to build the capacity of women candidates who are interested in seeking elective offices throughout the country either at state legislature, local governance levels or the national parliaments and executive offices (UNDP, 2011). The year 2000 witnessed world leaders through the international community take a stand on women's issue especially in the aspect of women empowerment through the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The third goal of the declaration out of the eight goals created clearly states to promote gender equality and empower women. This was also followed by other actions such as the establishment of an institution in the year 2010 exclusively created for women empowerment issues through its body named UN Women (Onyenekwa&Nkamnebe, 2011).

This institution created namely UN Women has been working in different positions of governance to limit gender inequality and gaps in the workings of men and women in all economic, social and political spheres of life. It gives supports to building bridges of international development plans and national gender policies. It also pushes for suitable and transparent funding of issues and programmes that enhances gender equality and the promotion of gender sensitive budgets of national governments with drawn indicators to watch and oversee progress of women in member state countries (UN Women, 2013).

Coupled with the UN's efforts at different regional structures that promote women's rights and good governance across the world in different countries. The African Union (AU) is an intergovernmental organisation that has also been taking giant steps towards the emancipation of the African women on the continent. The African Union in the year 2010 declared this present decade of 2010- 2020 the African Women's Decade (AWD) in order to continuously enhance gender equity and women's rights at country and continental levels (Pogoso, 2012). The AWD targets elevating the number of women in parliaments across the African continent so as to improve democratic governance structures, it also targets other reproductive areas of women such as improving maternal health and reducing maternal mortality, increase access to the education of women and girls, combat violence against women in every spheres of their lives, eliminate delayed justice for victims of various forms of gender violence and empowering women economically and in various sectors towards a sustainable development (ACHPR, 2004) .

All these various governance institutions across the globe are all pushing towards the singular goal of women empowerment and eliminating barriers to women's full participation in politics and decision making processes. In addition pressure groups such as the civil society are also lending their credible voices to the call towards this action. The boom of the information world and technology is also playing a vital role in the information and the enlightening of women's issues across the globe. The social media has proved to be a fast and potent tool that can be used to lobby pressure and educate the masses on the need to support a cause that improves women's representation in politics.

It is worthy to note that gender equality and gender equity thrives well in an environment where democracy and its institutions flourish appropriately. Countries with democracy in place are believed to have the women in such societies fare better than undemocratic societies (Oluwole, 2014). Democratic governance is expected to open up more spaces for participation and representation of women in the political arena. It opens up more avenues for deliberations and discussions without any form of fear or favour with all stakeholders which ultimately lead to further deepening of democratic values in such societies (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 2000). As highlighted in previous pages of this research, democracy promotes fair, freedom of speech and information, civil and political rights and ensures a more equitable distribution of power and resources among all groups of a society. This research argues that the recognition and respect for women's rights as part of the fundamental human rights is the backbone of democratic governance that is gender sensitive.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) Universal Declaration on Democracy in the year 1997 reinforces the beliefs that the major principles of democracy are accountability and participation. It states that citizens who have attained the age of adult suffrage regardless of sex or ethnic groups have the right to participate in how decisions governing a country are made either through voting or being voted for in free, fair and transparent elections that is void of violence or coercion. It also underscores the need for governments to be responsive to the needs and agitations of its citizens (IPU, 2000). A responsible democratic government needs to listen to the cry of women emancipation and empowerment from different spheres of the world ranging from civil society at local levels to the call for immediate action by intergovernmental/international organisations. Most essentially, the IPU declaration clearly stipulates that democracy translates to a meaningful interaction, partnership or team work between the males and females of a given society in conducting its affairs and working towards gender governance (Goetz, 1998; IPU, 2000; IDEA, 2010).

The application of the term gender equality will try to provide answers to the following questions in correlations with the practice of democracy in a society: Who are those empowered to make decisions? Whose voices are given access to be heard in the process of decision making? What roles or impacts do the decisions taken have on the lives of the citizens? Have the citizens especially marginalised groups such as women fared better with the introduction of such decisions in the forms of policies or laws? Who turns out to be the utmost winners or losers in the governance schemes instituted in the country? All of these questions can only be effectively handled and answered by engendering governance institutions in our different countries. It is no more news that women have been greatly marginalised in decision making processes at all levels which influences the outcomes of governance decisions.

The success of gender governance in practice will require strong commitments from all sexes. Gender is construed as the socially acceptable norm in a society based on biological features and how these roles impacts on power relations between male and female from the least level to the highest level of decision making processes (British Council, 2012). A focus on women specifically to remedy the problem will be counterproductive but working to improve social relationships between men and women in our society will produce better results in fostering gender governance that ultimately targets the increase of women's participation and representation in politics (Goetz, 1998; Iwuchukwu, 2013; Karl, 1995; Lewu, 2012).

Gender-sensitive governance also translates to social transformation because governance institutions can mould the beliefs and perceptions of males and females and the different roles each is supposed to play in a society (Gender Hub, 2014). Significantly, the equal representation and participation of women in governance is an essential goal which often requires collective efforts that involves and empowers the minority and marginalised groups of any society. For effective and efficient smooth-running democratic institutions in the levels of political, administrative or judicial, citizens must have a sense of belonging and ownership to decisions taken that impact on their daily lives. Women's involvement in conjunction with men in setting policy goals and taking decisions at local, national, regional or global levels will mean a more responsive process that addresses the agitations and interests of all groups in a society that will further contribute to gender equality and equity and the achievement of gender-sensitive governance (Kenworthy&Mallami, 1999; Lipschutz, 1992; Milner, 1997).

Women's empowerment which ultimately translates to gender equality has gained prominence in several global declarations, treaties and covenants (Ejumudo, 2013). A reason not far-fetched from the global understanding that gender equity is key to sustainable development that targets poverty eradication, good governance, good standard of living, wealth creation, and access/opportunities to decision making processes and policy implementation institutions (Gender Hub, 2014). Africa as a continent has not been left behind in this quest for gender equality and women empowerment most especially in the promotion of women's inclusion and representation in the political process. Some specific developmental actions have been established such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) protocol in 1981; the 2003 protocol on Women's rights; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) protocol on Democracy and Good Governance; the 2001 New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) are all in conjunction with the global commitment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are some of the giant steps being taken by the continent through its regional and sub-regional bodies.

African women have hitherto been subjected to various forms of marginalisation and exclusion from the political process (Falola&Fwatshak, 2012; Lewu, 2012). The aforementioned mechanisms of the AU and ECOWAS strive to put a correction to the irregularity of gender imbalance in governance on the continent. Various traditional cultures and religious practices aside the legacy of colonialism have played huge roles in keeping women especially in Africa confined to the private space of the home

(Lewu, 2012). Education which is an important tool to correct some of these irregularities is still far from the reach of many girl-children in sub Saharan Africa. Provision of free and compulsory basic education still remains an illusion for many of the girls on the continent especially in Sub Sahara Africa and this has a huge negative impact on the political participation of these women in the future (Kenworthy&Mallami, 1999).

Nevertheless, women's representation in politics and decision making levels on the continent have begun to gather momentum with a slight increase in the number of women elected into national parliaments facilitated by the use of the quota system (Oluwole, 2014). This system has been adopted by some African countries such as Rwanda with over 40% of which is very impressive and should be copied by other African countries. But globally, the number of women in active politics or represented at top decision making levels is still very low. Hence, the issue of women political participation in global politics becomes a serious issue. Women have been poorly represented and marginalised in the field of global politics (Meyer &Prugel, 1999; Oluwole, 2014; CISLAC, 2012).

The persistent under representation of Nigerian women in politics after elections gives a continuous source of worry to civil society organisations and stakeholders (Onyenenkwa&Nkamnebe, 2011). Scholars argue that regardless of the fact that women play huge roles during campaigns and electioneering processes, men continues to occupy over eighty per cent of political positions (Mohammed,2012; Phillips, 1991; Rees, 2002). Over the years, there had been several national and local consultations on how to increase the participation and representation of women in politics through the enforcement of positive actions that requires a minimum of thirty-five (35%) per cent of women in elected and appointed positions in the governance of a country (Mohammed, 2012).

Various studies have shown that the more women are represented in the parliaments of their various countries, the more they have the capacity to contribute to issues that bring to the front burner on gender empowerment (Mohammed &Zaid , 2014; Cislac, 2012; IPU, 2002). For a democracy to flourish, a non-negotiable prerequisite is women's active political participation. The facilitation of women's involvement in decision makings at national to local levels ensures a better equitable and accountable system to women of the country (Paxton, 1997; Pogoson, 2012). Despite the progress being made by several women groups and international organisations, the general elections held in 2011 and 2015 in Nigeria have not improved the lot of women in terms of representation in the political arena (Cislac, 2012; Shogbesan, 2015). But, this continues to be a challenge in many African countries including Nigeria. Asidestradiational, cultural, religious and hereditary colonial problems, the political parties in the country have not effectively addressed women's interests and agitations (CISLAC, 2012; Tsan, 2015). Women candidates encounter alot of barriers even at the point of contesting for party primaries with their male counterparts (Lewu, 2012). Women have not been apolitical or disillusioned to politics. They have always played important roles in the entrenchment of democratic values (Cislac, 2012; Reynolds, 1999; Womankind, 2014). One of the important values of democracy is that the interests, needs and agitations of citizens should be given a voice to, be heard and deliberated upon and eventually leading to formation of relevant policies or legislations of adequate laws. Women make up half of the world's population and as such gives it a cogent reason for their voices to be heard and given a space to adequately participate on the political platform (UN Women, 2013).

As restated by Wilke-Launer (2009), democracy definitely needs women as active participants in order to be effectively democratic and inclusive, while women also need democratic tools to empower and give active voice to change repressive laws and negative traditional values. That have been contributing to excluding and marginalising them from the political process and other socio-economic spheres of life. Democracy provides the powerful tool of boosting women's participation and representation and achieving gender equality and equity (Gender Hub, 2014). Article seven of the CEDAW Convention highlights the importance of women's participation and representation in the political systems of each and every respective country of the world. CEDAW as an international tool, seeks to create a platform that guarantees for women a higher representation in leadership and decision making processes. And ensuring equal right with the male counterparts "to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government" (CEDAW 1979: Article 7).

The United Nations through the General Assembly Resolution on the political participation of women further emphasised the position of women "that the active participation of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making is essential to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy7" (UN 2011: A/RES/66/130). But it is quite regrettable to observe that, despite several mechanisms of international instruments and/or declarations in place. And with its form of universalism not leaving out any culture or race or country in its adoption, progress has

remained quite stagnant, slow or sometimes retrogressive for women in the representation of political offices (Obiora, 2005; Ojo, 2010). The fourth UN world women conference held in Beijing, China 1995 popularly referred to as the Beijing Platform for Action proposed a mere thirty five per cent reservations or slots for women in decision making processes either in elective or appointive positions are yet to be realised (Ejemudo, 2013).

Yet with all the aforementioned tools and declarations by the United Nations and other regional bodies, nothing seem to have improve the representation and participation of women in politics globally. Women on the average are still less than one in five elected into national parliaments in most countries (IPU, 2002). Women still remain grossly underrepresented in decision making bodies from the local to national and global levels (Lewu, 2012; Ross, 2002). There have not been enough continuous and committed practical actions that make political institutions accountable established globally and/or nationally that can see to the enforcement of positive action for women. This most times results in the marginalisation of women's interest in public policy and failure in responding to their interests.

Therefore, for a democracy to live up to its true meaning in the enforcement of any country, women should not have barriers such as laws or customs that prevent them access to full participation in the political sphere. Studies have argued that the equal participation of women leads to governments being more representative and accountable (Ross, 2002; WRAPA 2004; Gender Hub; 2014). Though in many countries including Nigeria, legislations are changing to adjust and bridge the political gap between men and women, customary practices still keep serving as a serious blockage to these efforts. This study looks at three ways as emphasised by Gender Hub (2014) on how to improve Gender Inequality.

1.2 Three Dimensions to improving Gender Inequality

(a) *Governance as gendered institutions*: Goetz (1997) argues institutions make only a part of governance but it is the most important means or force for change. Gender inequalities are often continued by institutions because they often repeat existing norms through their policies, processes and structures (Goetz 1997; Cislac 2012). Even though, scholars have argued that the same institutions are also very powerful tools that can be used to push towards affirmative change, hierarchical structures and mechanisms such as parliaments, government agencies or informal structures like the potent relations in marriage. That are seen and accepted as the norm in our different societies also impact heavily on gender structures. These institutions either in formal or informal social structures reproduce social power relations which are deeply embedded in racial, class and gender differences which may put some persons at more privileged positions above others (Eduards,1994). Institutions are often exploited in the perpetual favour of those who are in power and do not challenge the inequalities being continued in the society. Hence it becomes important to study the factors and causes of gender inequalities in a society, the type of laws and policies in place that fosters some particular hierarchies to exist and why such gender marginalisation have become the acceptable idea in such societies.

(b) *Governance as gendered processes*: Governance is prompted by processes. The institutions serve as the foundation to these processes (Gender Hub, 2014). These processes are consist of Daily administration of a country through its civil service and specialised agencies, legislations at the levels of parliament and top level decisions of the executive arm of government from local to national and global levels. These processes happen within institutions (Goetz 1997). Most times, these processes in governance make divisions reinforced via the actors and stakeholders working within these institutions. It could be in the delegation of responsibilities and duties. Most times, women are at the bottom of decision making processes, they are marginalised as individuals vested with high authority to influence important decisions. Even excluded from being legislators or members of the national parliaments or appointed ministers or members of the government's cabinet and are therefore unable to push forward their agenda.

(c) *Governance as gendered relationships*: Another central factor to institutions and processes in gender is gender relationship as identified by Goetz (1997) and Gender Hub (2014). Governance as engendered relationships takes a look at the kind of interactions that occur within and outside institutions and with the various stakeholders within and outside these institutions. It is very significant here to examine the unequal power relations and dynamics between males and females in these institutions. To push for reforms that target gender governance in any country will need good gender relations between the men and women of such society. To have effective gender accepting programmes across different ministries and sectors of a country, a good working relationship has to be established that promotes healthy communication between different stakeholders at different levels of governance in any society. This kind of affirmative gender relationship will enhance the process of getting women's concerns, interests and needs to policy makers. Either at the local or national levels through different

consultation mediums that may result to the making and enforcement of gender sensitive laws in order to increase women's representation and participation in politics.

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